

# ALWAYS Check Your Medications

consumer *brief*

## WHY SHOULD YOU CHECK YOUR MEDICATIONS?

**TAKING THE WRONG MEDICATION CAN HAVE SERIOUS HEALTH CONSEQUENCES. IT CAN BE DANGEROUS AND DEADLY.**

New Jersey's pharmacists are well educated and well trained, and they work hard to meet the strict safety standards imposed by the law and enforced by the State Board of Pharmacy. However, unfortunate errors are possible. While the Division of Consumer Affairs' Enforcement Bureau investigates reported mistakes, we urge consumers to **verify that the medication you received is the medicine that you should be taking.**

It is also possible for you to make a mistake if you have many different kinds of medications at home. Some medications, that are very different, can look similar and can be easily confused.

As an example, fluoride tablets are similar in size, shape, and color to pills for the cancer treatment drug tamoxifen. But they can be distinguished by the imprint codes on the pills. Certain fluoride tablets are stamped "SCI" on one side and "1007" on the other; while tamoxifen pills have "M" on one side and "274" on the other.

**Every time you fill a prescription,** before taking the pills home, **ask your pharmacist** to review the medication with you, and make sure the prescription was filled accurately. If you use a mail order prescription service, call the mail order pharmacy to verify the medications.

**When taking medicine at home,** if you are ever in doubt as to whether you're taking the correct medication or if you fear your medications may have been mixed up, call the poison center experts at the **New Jersey Poison Information and Education System (NJPIES), 800-222-1222.**

**When talking with your pharmacist or NJPIES, always verify:**

- The name of the person for whom the medication was prescribed
- The name of the medication
- The strength of the dose, and
- The color, size, shape, and markings of the capsules, tablets, or caplets.

You can refer to the **information provided by the drug manufacturer**, to learn whether the medication matches the color, size, shape, and markings of the drug in question. You should also verify that all pills you receive for the same prescription, are **uniform** in the way they look.

If a refill medication looks or tastes different in any way, contact the pharmacy to make sure you have the correct medication. If you still have a question, you or the pharmacist may **contact the prescribing physician** for further information.

**Additional tips:** Before taking any medication, be certain you know exactly how it should be taken. Ask the pharmacist, read the labels completely, and follow all directions. Be sure you know how, when, and for how long you should take the medicine. Ask whether there are restrictions regarding food, drink, or other medications. Find out whether you may be allergic to the medication. Know what to do if you miss a dose, and how the medicine should be stored.

**NJPIES, at 800-222-1222, can help with these and other questions.** Experts including doctors, registered nurses, and pharmacists are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They can identify pills based on their appearance and markings, and ensure that you understand the directions for use.

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